

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT

SERGEANT MAJOR WALTER M. HETZLER

Inducted 29 September 2011



Sgt. Maj. Walter M. Hetzler was born in a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Alabama on Oct. 10, 1938 and grew up in Oak Ridge, Tenn. Upon graduation from Oak Ridge High School in 1957, Hetzler enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served three years, attaining the rank of lance corporal. After he was honorably discharged in 1960, he returned home, working as a bartender and serving in the USMC Reserve until 1964.

In 1965, Hetzler enlisted in the U.S. Army and volunteered for Special Forces training, graduating as a medical sergeant. He was assigned to ODA-17, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Bad Toelz, Germany, as a junior medical sergeant. In 1968, he was assigned to 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and deployed to Vietnam. During his two years in country, he served with A-503 Mobile Strike, or MIKE, Force and B-55. When Hetzler returned stateside, he was assigned to Fort Bragg, N.C., as an instructor at the U.S. Army's Institute for Military Assistance Medical Committee, which was responsible for training and certifying new SF medics.

Hetzler returned to Vietnam for a second tour, assigned to the Delta Project, Military Assistance Command Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group, or MACV-SOG, from 1971-1972. Following his service in Vietnam, he was assigned to 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) on Okinawa, where he spent two years on ODA-152. Hetzler returned to Fort Bragg in 1974, to work as a medical specialist, with a follow-on assignment as a senior medical instructor with Special Forces, U.S. Army Institute for Military Assistance. From Fort Bragg, he transferred to the United States Army Intelligence Support Activity, or USAISA, Fort Belvoir, Va., serving as the medical supervisor. Hetzler was promoted at USAISA and finished his four-year service with the unit as squadron sergeant major. His final years in the Army were spent with the 2nd Battalion, 1st SF Group, Fort Lewis, Wash., as the Company B sergeant major.

Hetzler's military education includes the Special Forces Medical Sergeant Course; Advanced Cardiac Life Support Instructor Course; U.S. Army Europe Noncommissioned Officer Academy; Basic Intelligence Course; Danish Scout Swimmer Course; Danish Demolitions Interdiction Course; Summer Mountaineering Course; Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Course (91B); First Sergeant Course; U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy; Security Breaching Course; and Gunsight Weapons Course.

Hetzler retired from the Army in 1993, but he remains involved with the training and education of Special Forces Soldiers.

His awards and decorations include: Silver Star Medal; Legion of Merit; Bronze Star Medal (two awards, one with "V" Device); Navy Commendation Medal (with "combat distinction" device); Purple Heart; Meritorious Service Medal (two awards); Army Commendation Medal; Army Achievement Medal; National Defense Service Medal (with Bronze Star device); Vietnam Service Medal; Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm; Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal; Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Honor Medal, 1st and 2nd class; Combat Medical Badge; Special Forces Tab; and the Master Parachutist Badge.